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News release

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Howard Government Shuns Tuvalu Refugees

New Zealand's agreement to accept refugees from Tuvalu driven from their homes by rising sea levels highlights the moral bankruptcy of Australia's refusal to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, according to the Executive Director of The Australia Institute, Dr Clive Hamilton.

Apparently contradicting claims by Environment Minister Robert Hill that the Australian Government has received no formal approach, a Tuvalu official, Mr Paani Laupepa told the BBC this week:

“While New Zealand responded positively in the true Pacific way of helping one's neighbours, Australia on the other hand has slammed the door in our face.

“Its justification is to compare Tuvaluans with the asylum seekers trying to enter Australia illegally.”

The Howard Government has said that it will not ratify the Kyoto Protocol despite the fact that Australia has the highest level of greenhouse gas emissions per person of any industrialised country, 30 per cent higher than the USA, and was given an extremely lenient target at the Kyoto conference.

Tuvalu is a group of nine Pacific islands with a population of a little over 10,000. The latest UN report on climate change predicts sea-level rise of up to 90 centimetres by the end of the century. Tuvaluans say they are already being affected by coastal erosion, salt water intrusion affecting crops and an unusually high level of tropical cyclones.

New Zealand has agreed to accept the exodus of Tuvaluans under a scheme beginning in 2002 and running over some decades. Other nations expected by the UN to face severe problems from sea-level rise include The Maldives, Kiribati, The Bahamas and Bangladesh, all of which are members of the Commonwealth.

“The Labor Party's no-strings-attached decision to ratify the Kyoto Protocol is a very positive step, one that will start the process of winning back some international environmental credibility for Australia”, said Dr Hamilton.

For the full BBC Online report see
news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/English/sci/tech/newsid_1581000/1581457.stm

Clive Hamilton is the author of *Running From the Storm: The development of climate change policy in Australia* (UNSW Press), launched on Monday by NSW Premier Bob Carr.